



Critical thinking is a pervasive and purposeful human phenomenon. The ideal critical thinker can be characterized not merely by her or his cognitive skills but also by how she or he approaches life and living in general. This is a bold claim. Critical thinking goes way beyond the classroom. In fact, many of the experts fear that some of the things people experience in school are actually harmful to the development and cultivation of strong critical thinking. Critical thinking came before schooling was ever invented, it lies at the very roots of civilization. It is a corner stone in the journey human kind is taking from beastly savagery to global sensitivity. Consider what life would be like without the things on this list and we think you will understand.

The approaches to life and living which characterize critical thinking include:

- Inquisitiveness with regard to a wide range of issues.
- Concern to become and remain well-informed.
- Alertness to opportunities to use critical thinking.
- Trust in the processes of reasoned inquiry.
- Self-confidence in one's own abilities to reason.
- Open-mindedness regarding divergent world views.
- Flexibility in considering alternatives and opinions.
- Understanding of the opinions of other people.
- Fair-mindedness in appraising reasoning.
- Honesty in facing one's own biases, prejudices, stereotypes, or egocentric tendencies.
- Prudence in suspending, making or altering judgments.
- Willingness to reconsider and revise views where honest reflection suggests that change is warranted.

What would someone be like who lacked those dispositions?

It might be someone who does not care about much of anything, is not interested in the facts, prefers not to think, mistrusts reasoning as a way of finding things out or solving problems, holds his or her own reasoning abilities in low esteem, is close-minded, inflexible, insensitive, cannot understand what others think, is unfair when it comes to judging the quality of arguments, denies his or her own biases, jumps to conclusions or delays too long in making judgments, and never is willing to reconsider an opinion. Not someone prudent people would want to ask to manage their investments!

Strong critical thinkers can also be described in terms of how they approach specific issues, questions, or problems. The experts said you would find these sorts of characteristics:

- Clarity in stating the question or concern,
- Orderliness in working with complexity,
- Diligence in seeking relevant information,
- Reasonableness in selecting and applying criteria,
- Care in focusing attention on the concern at hand,
- Persistence though difficulties are encountered,
- Precision to the degree permitted by the subject and the circumstances.

So, how would a weak critical thinker approach specific problems or issues? Obviously, by being muddle-headed about what he or she is doing, disorganized and overly simplistic, spotty about getting the facts, apt to apply unreasonable criteria, easily distracted, ready to give up at the least hint of difficulty, intent on a solution that is more detailed than is possible, or being satisfied with an overly generalized and uselessly vague response. Remind you of anyone you know?